

Labor, Would You Like a Twenty-Minute Day?

In a Satire Which Is Full Of Timeliness, Clement Vautel Tries Novel Experiment

THE proposal of Mr. James P. Holland, head of the New York State Federation of Labor, for a six-hour working day appears to have been conveyed by some amazing telepathy to the French workmen of the future, and to have inspired them to a further urging of the process. As related by Clément Vautel in the veracious pages of "Je Sais Tout," on May Day of the year 1922 the proletariat of Paris raised the cry, "Long live the seven-hour day!" That demand soon prevailed, but it was no finality. On May Day, 1925, the cry was "Long live the six-hour day!" Surely, to give one-fourth of the time to the bosses, the exploiters, the bourgeois, was certainly sufficient. Besides, mechanical inventions had made it possible to do work much more rapidly than before. When a week sufficed for the building of a house, and three minutes for the soiling of a pair of shoes, it was superfluous to have men toil seven hours a day. So, despite a few reactionaries, the six-hour day was soon decreed.

Next, on May Day, 1928, the proletariat made the air of Paris vocal with "Long live the five-hour day!" Surely this was long enough to labor, in a time when, thanks to the velocity of aviation, round trip tickets between Paris and New York were good for only forty hours. In that year M. Sacha Guity, of the French Academy, dictated a three-act drama in thirty-seven minutes twenty-two and three-fifths seconds; a 200-h.p. automobile was finished eleven minutes after the first stroke upon it; and in the electric greenhouses of Achères full grown cabbages were produced every quarter of an hour from seed.

There then appeared successively and successfully:

- The four-hour day;
- The three-hour day;
- The two-hour day;
- The one-hour day.

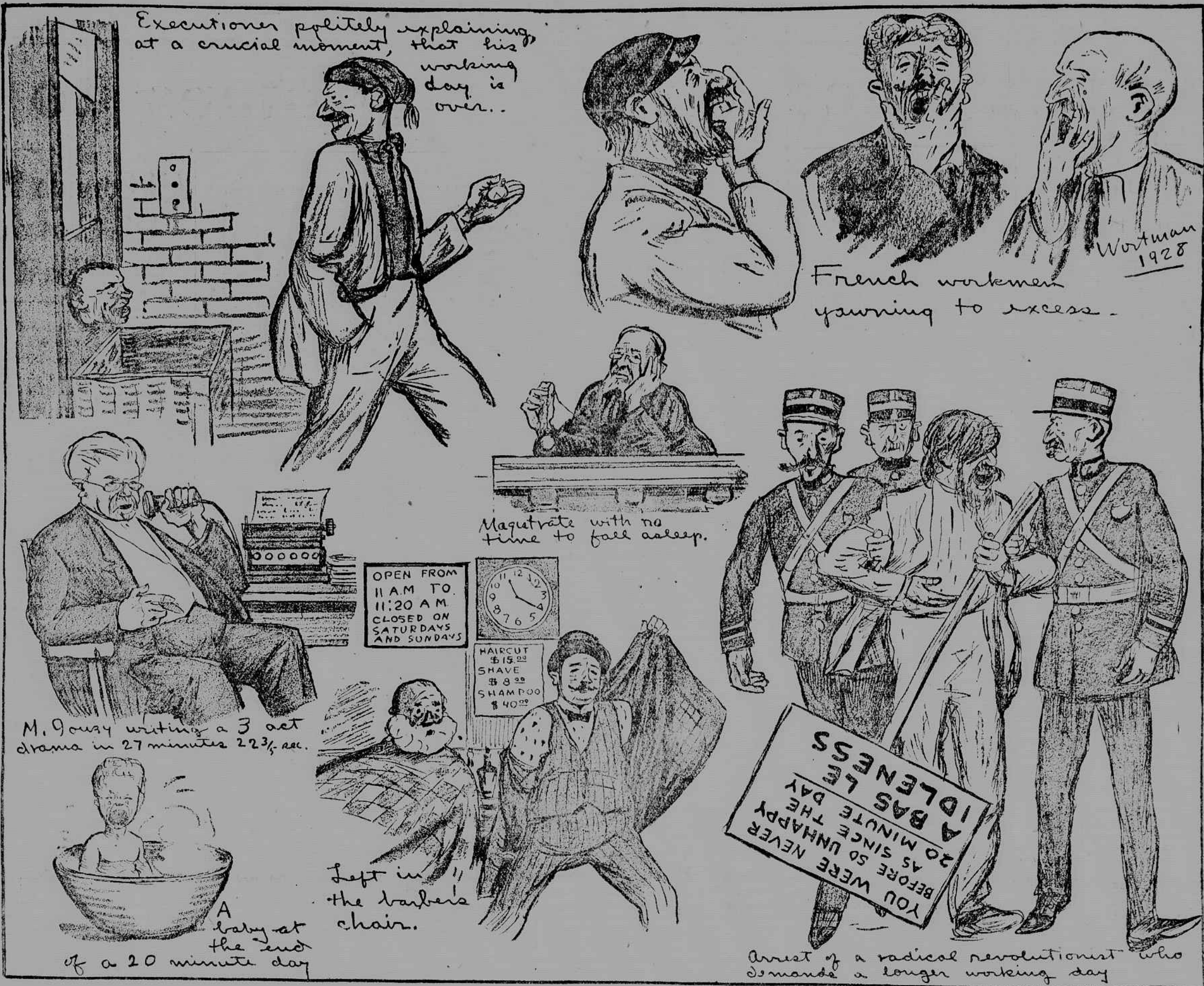
The one-hour day lasted exactly one year! That is to say, it was practiced daily for that time.

Then an apostle of the new dispensation found in the gospel according to St. Jules Guesde this prophetic passage:

"In that time, triumphant mechanism will permit the limitation of the workmen's daily effort to twenty minutes."

The Twenty-Minute Day!

It was impossible not to be charmed with this programme. The G. F. L. had no difficulty in having it adopted. And the twenty-minute day became the legal working day.



But It Doesn't Work! And 1923 Labor Unanimously Decides for Longer Hours

since in twenty minutes' work one had not time to perspire.

Alas! The good government had not thought of the organization of leisure. Every citizen had, each day, twenty-three hours and forty minutes at his disposal. He could not well give more than eleven hours to sleep. What to do with the rest of the time?

The cabaret, the cinema, the fox trot? These were insufficient, the more so since with the cabaret and the cinema the twenty-minute day was inexorably enforced.

Ennui reigned. Formerly the workman used to sing at his work. Now he yawned in his idleness.

The government saw that the situation was grave. A people that is weary is a people that will do some foolishness. The Ministry of Labor, which had become useless, was transformed into a Ministry of Idleness. A practical man was placed at its head.

"Let us," he cried, "organize the pleasures of the people. It is not enough to give them leisure. We must provide the means of spending it. Let us have libraries, debating societies, museums, festivals of sports. Let us celebrate great democratic festivals with concerts and plays!"

And so it was done.

But soon the people had all read "Monte Cristo" and "The Mysteries of Paris" and "The Ironmaster," and libraries palled. The people had no mind to read manuals of civic education.

So with the lectures. In vain did the learned Professor Barbarol discourse on the history of administrative organization; and the great statistician Lempatry deftly juggle with figures; and the savant Pironette tell of the price of sweetbreads under Charlemagne and of goat cheese under Louis XI. The people would have none of it.

Twenty Minute Sports

The sports were more successful, but people in time wearied of seeing boxing matches and marathon races, all clipped to twenty minutes' duration. The museums fared no better. The celebrations of democratic anniversaries were sublime, or would have been had they not been confined to the procrustean measurement of twenty minutes.

Presently the revolutionists started a propaganda which badly worried the government.

"We want," they cried, "to work freely! Enough of leisure! Too much of idleness! To force us to be bored fourteen hours a day is odious tyranny. Comrades, to work! Let us work! A bas le idleness! Conspuez leisure!"

Then in the "Social," the organ of this new movement, appeared this news:

"The workmen of the house of Babylas have decided to stay at work a full hour every day. This decision was reached at a meeting at which inflammatory speeches were made. All attempts at conciliation were fruitless."

On May Day, 1941, the G. F. L. posted on the walls of Paris this bulletin:

"WORKINGMEN! 'You were never before so unhappy as since the advent of the twenty-minute day. 'You yawn to excess. 'You don't know what to do. You don't know where to go. You are like the lost souls. 'WE HAVE HAD ENOUGH OF IT! 'We must resume again the taste of life. 'There is but one way to do it. 'IT IS WORK! 'Work is health of body and mind. 'ALL STAND UP FOR THE ONE- HOUR DAY! 'A formidable manifestation was made in the streets of Paris, making the air ring with "Long live the one-hour day!" It was not long before the desired reform was granted. But the radical revolutionists were insatiable. The next year they demanded a two-hour day. Then there appeared, successively—and successfully: 'The three-hour day, 'The four-hour day, 'The five-hour, the six-hour, the seven-hour, the eight-hour day. At this moment we are at the eight-hour day. The deadly ennui which oppressed all men is dissipated. Gaiety brightens town and country. Democracy is no longer neurasthenic. Labor is rehabilitated; labor, so long calumniated and detested, labor, without which existence is unendurable. 'Long live Labor!"

The Lure of Labor: Who Can Resist?

By Seymour Barnard

I WAS watching the bricklayers who, in the few spare moments which the craft now and then sets aside as appropriate for work, were completing the third story of my new dwelling. The day before had been a legal holiday; the day before that, Sunday; and on the preceding Saturday no one had appeared upon the scene to seek solace in the blessedness of work. I appreciated, therefore, that to the men engaged upon my domicile the day was eventful in that it seemed to have been designated as the one in seven sacred to their calling. Accordingly I was both respectful and silent, though I felt strongly that the day's observance might have been marked by worship less of the spirit and more of the hand.

The Noon Hour

There being only forty-five minutes before whistle time, most of the men had knocked off work and were preparing for their noon hour. One of them had removed his jumper and overalls, revealing a trim figure of aristocratic mold in a correctly tailored suit of gray tweed. As a cloistered corporation lawyer naturally I knew little about the workingman. I had pictured a bricklayer as of the stereotyped variety, surprisingly well developed muscularly, considering the small amount of exercise he allowed himself between strikes. Yet this tweed-clad figure which I was regarding suggested intellect rather than brawn. Judging by him and by his mates as I had observed them while in action, it was easy to understand how a man of the reflective type of mind might abandon a profession in

favor of the trowel and mortar. In the midst of my contemplation a trim little sedan drew up at the curb. My friend in tweeds faced about upon the scaffold and waved a command to the chauffeur. For the first time I could see his face. Before me stood the professor whose friendship and teaching had meant untold things to me throughout my college career. Unabashed and quite naturally he answered my amazed look with a nod. "Come and have lunch with me," he said when he had descended the ladder. In his tidy sedan we made our way to the "Manual Arts Club," where, it seemed, my old friend had usually lunched. It was a sumptuous place, crowded with well dressed people who, like himself, my host explained, had abandoned professional life for some form of manual labor.

"You see," he said when we had given our order, "many of us teachers have come to feel that, after we have given, say, ten years to our profession, we are at liberty to enjoy the high pay and comparative ease which manual labor offers. The calling of the bricklayer permits me ample time to follow for my own edification the science I formerly pursued for others. There is just enough actual bricklaying to lend variety to life. The novelty of the work never wears off through over-indulgence. A generous portion of the week is spent in adjusting differences within our unions and additional time in settling strikes. Sociologically this is interesting; far more interesting than the controversies which engage the lower or, as you call them, the professional classes.

"Our pay? 'Wages,' we say. A minority of us favor the term sal-

ary,' but most of us feel that this connotes the meager compensation which prevails among the employing classes. At present I am getting only about treble my salary as a professor. But the three-day wage agreement under which our union is now working terminates to-morrow—a legal holiday, fortunately, which shortens the obnoxious arrangement by just one-third of the specified term.

"We profit by a most ingenious wage system, laid down by the men themselves. (Talk about the inability of the workingman to manage his own affairs!) It is a sliding scale, by which wages advance every time the leisure period of the day is lengthened, which happens with gratifying regularity. Thus we are insured against financial loss through time off.

"It is foolish in economists longer to insist that supply and demand regulate wages. Supply was long since eliminated as a factor by the unions. Demand alone prevails; not the demand for labor, but the demand for labor.

"You ask how my family regards my changed situation in life. Most favorably, let me say. In fact, my children have followed my example. I do not mean that they, too, are bricklayers. They, nevertheless, have chosen lines of work in which the influence of the employer is least felt and periods of employment satisfactorily irregular.

Daughter's Decision

"For example, my eldest daughter—"

"The missionary," said I, interrupting.

"Not since the actors' strike," answered the professor with considerable spirit. "When she heard that

the chorus girls at the Hippodrome had won a minimum wage of thirty-five dollars a week she canceled her passage to South Africa and joined the show.

"My son," resumed my old friend, "who received his M. D. a year ago and who is now an interne in a hospital, has applied for the position of ambulance driver. He believes that the men will soon be organized, and ambulance driving being a most essential form of industry, he sees how wages can be forced to a point far above the remuneration of the medical practitioner. 'Fancy,' he said to me, 'a strike of ambulance drivers at a time of epidemic or widespread disaster!'"

The professor settled back in his chair and lighted a cigar. "I suppose it's time for work again," he said, reflectively.

"At what hour do you resume?" I asked, glancing at my watch and thinking of my uncompleted house with some little apprehension.

"There is no set hour," he replied. "Those first to report stand about chatting and smoking until all hands have arrived. It is not infrequently the case that there is just time enough to put our tools away and straighten up for the night."

He reached for the check the waiter tendered him. "I'm glad you like the club," he said, as he signed, acknowledging a complimentary observation of mine. "It was once a corner saloon, they tell me, where the workmen used to bring their lunch to eat with their beer. Little by little it has been improved to keep up with the rising status of the workers. There is a long waiting list," he volunteered. "Some of the large employers are mad to get in. There is no hope for them, though. Possession of a union card

is one of the first requirements.

"This is but one of a large number of workingmen's clubs, and, I must confess, one of the least exclusive. Its membership is recruited from those who have risen to manual labor from the ranks of the intellectuals. None of us would be admitted to any of the Simon-pure workingmen's clubs, where every member was born and bred to his calling as a day laborer. There is a great deal of class feeling in the unions and much pride of ancestry. What is more, all workmen know that polite society is a veritable hot-bed for the propagation of socialism and other objectionable heresies. Those of us who have sprung from this element are naturally under suspicion."

"Then you don't incline toward socialism?" I asked in surprise.

"Not much!" the professor ejaculated fiercely, pounding the table. "Socialism would mean a monstrous reversion. Emancipated as we are from the cares of ownership and the annoyances of business, with practically all of the profits accruing to us, why should we desire a change? The old order has been reversed. To-day it is those who own who make up the slave class. Only the toilers are really free. All this talk in favor of socialism is started by the employers who believe that they are entitled to a share in the rewards of labor. Witness the subtle way they spread their insidious doctrine—by allowing the workers a voice in the management, by the formation of shop committees; all part of a diabolical attempt at a leveling process through which they hope to make themselves our equals."

"I had never thought of it that way," I said.

"A fact, though," replied the pro-

fessor. "Our hardest task to-day is to convince the public that the workingman no longer envies his employer."

Although I had found my old friend most absorbing, it was somewhat trying thus to linger over our luncheon with my new house still far from finished and the winter almost upon us. Finally my companion pushed back his chair.

"Not that there is any particular hurry," he said, apologetically.

"I know that you are a busy man," I hastened to say, jumping to my feet with alacrity. "There need be no apology whatever."

Plenty of Time

"Quite by the way," continued the professor, leading the way out, "we weren't figuring on completing your job much before next summer. You see, your place is in a location we all find very convenient, and it serves admirably to bring the men together now and then. In fact, it serves as quite a social center for us."

It is needless to say that I found this information a little depressing. "But," I suggested, "once it is finished you will find the house much more comfortable than in its present state, and let me assure you that my home will always be at the disposal of you and your colleagues. Naturally, I should not expect your claim upon it to cease merely because it had been finished."

On behalf of his fellows and himself the professor thanked me. "And," said he graciously, as we re-entered his sedan, "if only every one in the class you represent would meet us with the same generous spirit you have displayed, assuredly the breach between capital and labor would exist no more."